

Thoreau Woods UU Church – Worship Service
911 Remembered
October 2, 2011

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

We light this candle

For the light of truth and reason

For the warmth of love and friendship

For the flame of strength and action

And for the vision of tolerance and justice.

Announcements

John Pepper

Visitors, Welcome! We are happy to have you here.

(Pause)

If you would like, please sign our guest book on the table in the entryway and give your address or email if you want to receive our newsletter. If you would like to become a member, we have an application form also on the table you can fill out and turn in when you are ready.

Next week Ervin Boehm will be sharing thoughts from the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly of 2011: The 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the UUA which was held in Charlotte, NC.

Our special collection this morning is for Operation Wildfire. Please make check payable to the charity and put in collection basket.

Lunch today

Are there any other announcements from the floor?

Opening Words

John Pepper

Please join with me now in a spirit of worship.

Inevitably our anguish frames the question “Why?” if not on our lips, in our hearts. There is no answer that removes this question – no answer that can bridge the chasm of irreparable separation. Life will never be the same, and this is as it should be, for our loved ones are not expendable.

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We can meet such loss only with our grief, that uncontrived mixture of courage, affirmation, and inconsolable desolation. Grief is enough; for, in our grief we live an answer, as in the depths love and selfishness conjoin until, if we allow it, love asserts its dominance, and we become more aware of the community of living of which life makes us part.

Great Occasions, From a selection by Paul N. Carnes, p197

Hymn

Please join me singing Hymn No. 346 “Come Sing a Song With Me”

Joys and Concerns

John Pepper

As an expression of our connectedness and community, you are invited to come forward and share a joy, sorrow or concern as you light a candle. Or you may choose to light a candle without comment. Visitors, you are also encouraged to participate.

Please form a line to my left.

(Pause)

I will light one final candle for all those joys and concerns left unsaid.

Offertory Statement

Offertory Music

Story for All Ages – *The Peace Book* by Todd Parr

Responsive Reading (Insert)

Our responsive reading is an insert in your order of service and it is titled “In Troubled Times.” It comes from a book titled *Be the Change* written by Stephen Shick.

From the loneliness of troubled times, we come

To discover that we are not alone.

Into the dwelling place of togetherness, we come

To collect remnants of hope.

From the fear that all is lost, we come

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To discover what will save us.

Into the comfort of each other's arms, we come

To feel the strength that has not yet vanished.

From darkness, we come

To wait until our eyes begin to see.

Into the refuge of fading dreams, we come

To remove illusions and focus new visions.

From despair that walks alone, we come

To travel together.

Into the dwelling place of generations, we come

To pledge allegiance to being peace and doing justice.

Prayer

John Pepper

Please close your eyes, look out the window, simply relax in whatever way you center yourself for a time of prayer and meditation. After I share a brief reading with you, please meditate for a short time on your own personal thoughts.

The spiritual call to acknowledge blessings in the midst of suffering transcends time and theology. It proclaims that joy is not the absence of pain and suffering, but the affirmation that life is always worth our reverent attention.

The ancient Hebrew psalmist implored all creatures to *make a joyful noise unto God*. He didn't say to make a joyful noise only when we are happy.

After asserting the first Noble Truth that life is suffering, the Buddha became the smiling and laughing enlightened one.

In the Christian book of Galatians we read: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace (and) longsuffering*. Through a paradox of faith, human suffering is linked with the spirit of God.

The Hindu Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore put it yet another way:

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All the ... evils in the world have overflowed their banks, yet oarsmen, take your places with the blessing of sorrow in your souls.

It is impossible to intellectually understand the paradox that eternally links joy and suffering. But every day we are offered the blessing to experience it.

Be the Change, "Joy in Dark Times," p105

(Pause)

Amen!

Sermon – 9/11 Remembered

Just a few short weeks ago marked the 10th anniversary of tragic events in New York City, Washington, D.C., and on an isolated field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

By one accounting there were 2,996 deaths that day: 246 people on the four planes, 2,606 people in the New York City towers and on the grounds nearby, 125 people at the Pentagon, and 19 hijackers.

After such a tragedy, and truthfully after any tragedy, as a religious people there are some common elements of the grief process we can and should share together. The first is our need to mourn and grieve. The second is what we do with our emotions in the coming months and years helping us to move on in some tangible way. And finally there is the realization that life does go on for those who remain behind.

But first we must mourn and grieve the loss of the dead. There is no magical process by which mourning and grieving come to an end. It is an individual process and it is different for every person – and we must accept those differences.

Today for those of us who knew none of the victims of 9/11, the process is different and less personal than for those who knew someone or even lost a family member.

“It can be said that only man grieves. Only man loses a part of himself and knows he loses a part of himself and feels the loss intensely. The more deeply man feels, the more deeply man is involved in life, the more he grieves.

Furthermore, grief is an almost inevitable part of the life of any normal person. The only way to avoid grief is not to live. The very fact that we are alive and involved in the lives of other people means the virtual certainty of eventual grief.

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The minute we marry we invite the likelihood of grief. The minute we have children we invite the possibility of grief. Life means grief – in time. Love means grief – in time.

During the period of grief, the emotional ties to the lost person are broken, even as the physical ties have been broken and mentally reorganized. The emotional ties must be broken so that new emotional times may be created.

In the normal course of grief there will be a feeling of loneliness and unreality, an emptiness in the stomach, a feeling of insecurity, a strong temptation to withdraw from all activities.

Questions will be asked that cannot be answered like, “Why did God permit it?” There will be feelings of guilt. And there may be a tendency to lash out against anyone who presumably might have prevented the loss.

To facilitate grief’s work, let there be tears. Tears, as has been pointed out, are a mechanism for reducing the tension caused by grief. Tears are not a distortion of nature nor evidence of weakness. They are a means by which the grieving person works his or her way up from the depths.

And let there be talk. Repeat over and over again all the details surrounding the grief-producing tragedy. This makes the loss more realistic and the expectation that the loved one will return is dissipated.

When tears and talk flow freely, grief’s work is being done and in time the bereaved will come to realize what Jesus meant when he said, “Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted.”¹

And we as a religious people do attempt to comfort those who mourn. As of today there are now three official memorials which honor the men and women and children who died on that tragic day.

The Pentagon memorial opened in September of 2002. “To honor the 184 victims, 184 illuminated benches have been arranged in a landscaped 1.93 acre plot according to the victim’s ages, starting with Dana Falkenberg, 3, to Joy Yamnicky Sr., 71.

Each bench is engraved with the name of a victim. The benches representing the victims that were inside the Pentagon are arranged so those reading the names will face the Pentagon, where the plane hit; benches dedicated to victims aboard the plane are arranged so that those reading the engraved name will be facing skyward along the path the plane traveled. A wall along the edge of the Memorial begins at a height of 3 inches and rises to a height of 71 inches, the ages of the youngest and the oldest victims of the attack, and approximately 85 paperbark maple trees are planted on the memorial grounds.

¹ Great Occasions, Chadbourne A. Spring, p189-90.

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The National September 11th Memorial in New York City is a tribute of remembrance and honor to the nearly 3,000 people killed in the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 at all three sites as well as the six people killed in the World Trade Center bombing in February 1993.

The Memorial's twin reflecting pools are each nearly an acre in size and feature the largest manmade waterfalls in North America. The pools sit within the footprints where the Twin Towers once stood. The names of every person who died in the 2001 and 1993 attacks are inscribed into bronze panes edging the Memorial pools, a powerful reminder of the largest loss of life resulting from a foreign attack on American soil and the greatest single loss of rescue personnel in American history.

And lastly the First Phase of the Shanksville memorial finally open on Sept. 11th. The overall plan includes 2,200 landscaped acres, but for now there is only a visitor's center and a white marble structure overlooking the actual crash site inscribed with the names of the 40 victims from the flight. "The place is very serene. It's a beautiful landscape, it's a natural environment, it's where 40 heroes died thwarting another attack on our nation's capitol.

All three sites are reminders of the event and provide tangible physical places where anyone can go and mourn and remember and grieve. Things we must all do when tragedy strikes.

After a tragedy, most people move on but some don't or can't. Some hold on to that event and won't let it go and this requires isolation on their part. Others often try to grow or learn from the awful day.

"We ourselves must, in spite of an indifferent universe, keep alive the fire of our own intelligence and insight. Although the universe cares not particularly about our mortality and our ideals, we must care for them. Upon our shoulders is being carried the ark of life through the wilderness. All the virtues, all there is of goodness, kindness, courtesy, is of our own creation, and we must sustain them; otherwise they will go out of existence into darkness, as a star goes out. Apart from us, they are not. They are children born to humanity in its climb out of the valley of brutality, and we humans must give the color and zest.

We can be builders of a beautiful home for mankind on this temporary earth. We can be crusaders for human loveliness, for after all we are life's pilgrims out of the infinite and bound for a port unknown.

We are really more than businessmen, housewives, lawyers, mechanics, laborers, physicians. These are the things that keep us busy. We are also priests and prophets who carry the torch of life in "the proud procession of eternal things." We have come out of the darkness and bleakness of eternity as dreamers,

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lovers, creators, haters, despisers, companions to forest ferns, seabirds, and evening stars – all joined together by a universe that travels onward into the unknown.”²

Moving on typically requires reaching out in some emotionally cathartic way and possibly reaching out to others who have gone through similar tragedies. One such organization which attempts to bring us all together is simply called “911 stories – Our Voices, Our Choices.” They seek to educate in an attempt to promote dialogue on alternatives to war, along with educating the public on issues of war, peace, and the underlying causes of terrorism.

They also offer support and fellowship to others seeking non-violent responses to all forms of terrorism, both individual and institutional. But they also seek to inform us and call attention to threats to civil liberties, human rights, and other freedoms in the U.S. as a consequence of war.

And they seek to unite all people affected by violence and war, recognizing that the resulting deaths are overwhelmingly civilian.

These and other goals are noble goals, goals we can all support. But they also remind us through their partners that we are not alone – tragedy does not discriminate.

One partner is the Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC) and they remind us that civilians are caught in the crossfire of armed conflict around the world.

The Quakers are another partner and they are also known as the American Friends Service Committee. They are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service. Another similar organization is the Hague Appeal for Peace, which is dedicated to the abolition of war and making peace a human right – what a concept – “Peace a Human Right!”

And there is the group known as Veterans for Peace which attempts to raise public awareness of the true costs and consequences of militarism and war. And there is the group Military Families Speak out which promotes a simple mission, “Bring them home now!”

There are also disenfranchised people around the world like the Afghan Women’s Network dedicated to advancing the rights and protection of women in Afghanistan.

And lastly I will mention the “Never Again Campaign,” which spreads the message of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and promotes international understanding.

² Great Occasions, From *The Universe of Humanism* by Earl F. Cook, p294-5.

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Once again tragedy does not discriminate, all people everywhere can be affected, either directly or indirectly. We can isolate ourselves in our approaches to dealing with tragedy or we can reach out and share our anguish and our hopes with others who have gone through something similar.

When we reach out, we have the opportunity to grow, learn, understand, and heal. And we even have the opportunity to support others in their times of grief and pain.

“There are no compensations when death enters the perfect round and leaves a broken arc. Something has gone which can never be regained. Memories are sweet and gratitude for what has been is a healing medicine, but the whole pattern of life is changed. Arguments kindly offered by those who do not know avail nothing. The attempt to light a candle of argument does not bring the dawn.

But whatever the loss, whether it comes early or late, there is the unfinished adventure of life ahead; there are other people who have suffered and have needs which those who mourn can serve; there is work today, and there are the unborn for whom a kinder world may be provided; there are the counsels of our own hearts, counsels of self-respect and heroic living.

The reasons for living are not withdrawn when life is a broken arc. Follow those reasons; get back to the daily tasks; rejoin the circle of friends; remember to serve the people who crave what you, and perhaps you alone, can give. Then you will make a discovery: the loss has not grown less, but life has started anew. Scars remain, but health of spirit equal to the journey has been found. If there is darkness when you turn back or drop by the side of the road, there is also light when you go forward.”³

Yes, life will go on. As proof of that very fact, in a recent issue of *People* magazine, they profiled the Children of 9/11. Not children who survived 9/11, but children who were yet to be born of fathers who died. There is Lauren, Alexa, Rodney, Allison, Parker, Jamie, Ronald, Robyn, Grace and Gabriel. Some of their mothers have remarried and others have not.

Some have both older and younger siblings and others are only children. All are 9 years old.

Adopted by his stepdad, Gabriel is a catcher on his baseball team, which recently won a local championship. Alexa has blond hair and blue eyes like her dad and is told she tells jokes just like he did. Rodney participated in scouting for a while but he was the only boy without a dad and soon he quit scouting.

³ Great Occasions, from *Forward into Light*, by Frederick R. Griffin, p400

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All of these children have experienced ups and downs. Some are well-adjusted, others less adjusted. They are just like any other children who have lost a parent. Their fathers are not totally gone, they live on in their children.

In conclusion, when tragedy strikes we must mourn and grieve the loss. Eventually we must pick up the pieces and attempt to take the tragedy and make something meaningful out of it. Moving on may be hard, but it is something we must do. And there are no rules or required outcomes in this overall process, but life does go on. And we can make the best of it, or not. The choice, as always, is up to each of us.

For me, I choose Life! Namaste!

Sermon Talk Back

Closing Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able singing our final Hymn, No. 119 “Once to Every Soul and Nation” and remain standing for the Benediction.

Benediction

John Pepper

When sorrow comes, let us accept it simply, as a part of life. Let the heart be open to pain; let it be stretched by it. All the evidence we have says that this is the better way. An open heart never grows bitter. Or if it does, it cannot remain so.

In the desolate hour, there is an outcry; a clenching of the hands upon emptiness; a burning pain of bereavement; a weary ache of loss. But anguish, like ecstasy, is not forever. There comes a gentleness, a returning quietness, a restoring stillness. This, too, is a door to life. Here, also, is a deepening of meaning – and it can lead to dedication; a going forward to the triumph of the soul, the conquering of the wilderness.

And in the process will come a deepening inward knowledge that, in the final reckoning, all is well.

Amen, Namaste, and Go In Peace!

Rejoice Together, A. Powell Davies, 36

Extinguish the Chalice

Postlude